

# Beyond Obedience: The Information Behaviour of Assistance Dog Trainers

Pamela Harrison, MLIS & Dr. Joan Bartlett



## Background Information

### Study Population

- Trainers of assistance dogs performing the following functions:
  - Guide dogs (for visual impairment)
  - Hearing dogs (for hearing impairment)
  - Service dogs (for people with other diseases (e.g. diabetes or epilepsy), disabilities (e.g. limited mobility, autism, or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)
  - Facility dogs (to work in educational or healthcare settings)
- Employing organization accredited by, or a candidate for accreditation by, Assistance Dogs International, as of August 2013
- Located in North America

### Assistance Dogs International (ADI) Standards

ADI-accredited organizations must meet or exceed ADI standards. These include minimum requirements for:

- Ethical treatment of dogs
- Ethical treatment of partners
- Trainer knowledge and practice
- Behavioural standards for service dogs, including:
  - General behavioural requirements
  - Function-specific behavioural requirements

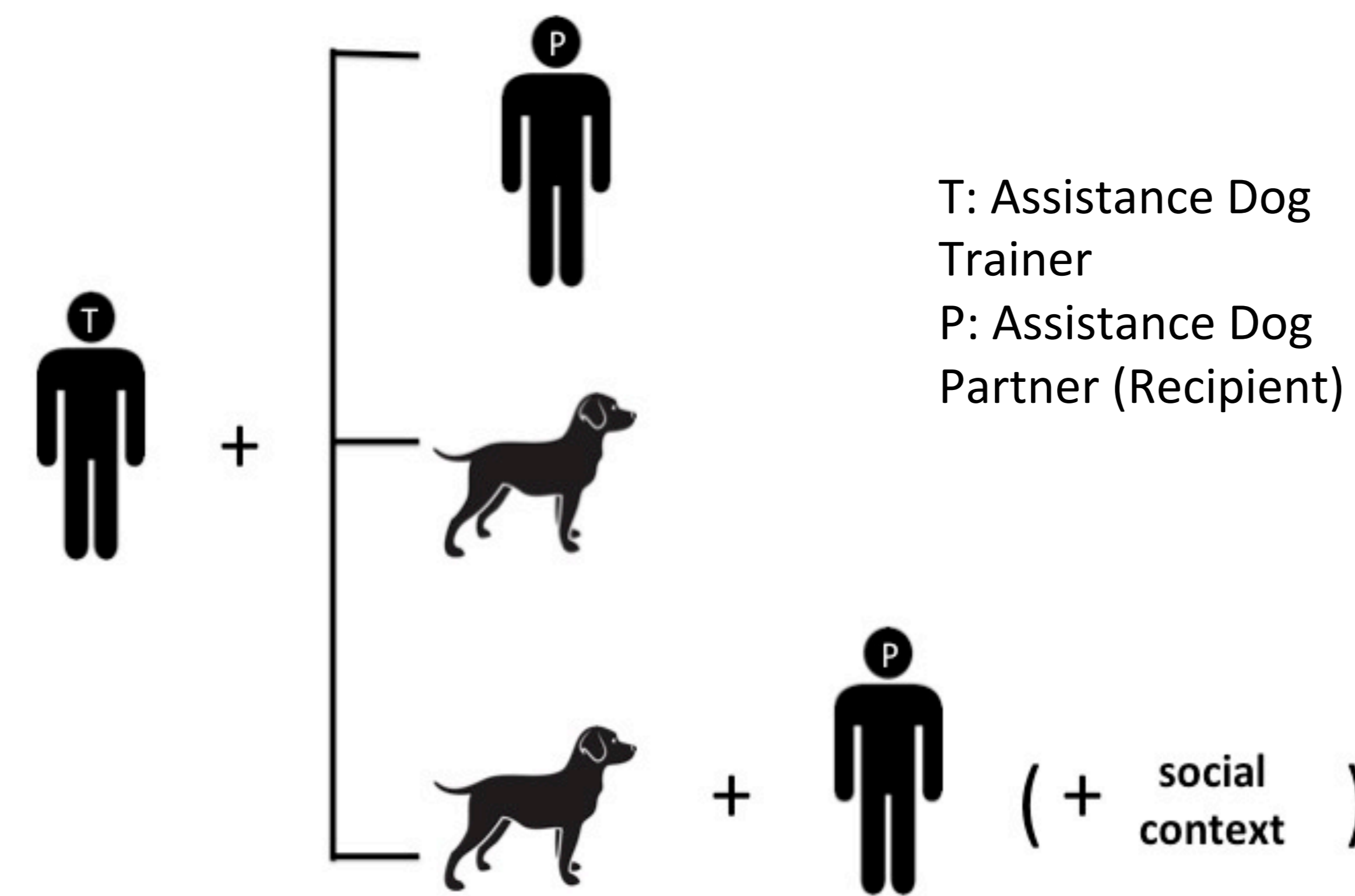
### Research Questions

- What are the work tasks of assistance dog trainers?
- What is the relationship between work tasks and information consultation, selection & use?
- What challenges do assistance dog trainers face in information consultation, selection & use?

### Methodology

- Recruitment by purposive sampling
- Demographic questionnaire
- Semi-structured interview (~45 minutes)
- Open coding of responses

### Work Task Categories



### Selection Factors

Three factors emerged as determining whether a trainer would select information for future use. These were:

- Alignment with individual or organizational philosophy
- Prior positive experience with the source
- Peer opinion of the source or content

"I'll look at it [a training book] online, and decide whether or not I like the philosophy or not or, I should say, whether or not it matches our [organization's] philosophy."

### Information use

In deciding how to train the dog, participants emphasized that the decision to apply selected information to a work task is situation-specific:

"Every dog is different ... They're like people. Everybody learns differently. So if your normal, general way of teaching a retrieve isn't working with this dog, you've got to really think about how you can get the information across."

"I work with each individual dog, I train with them, according to the method they need, that will help them learn best."

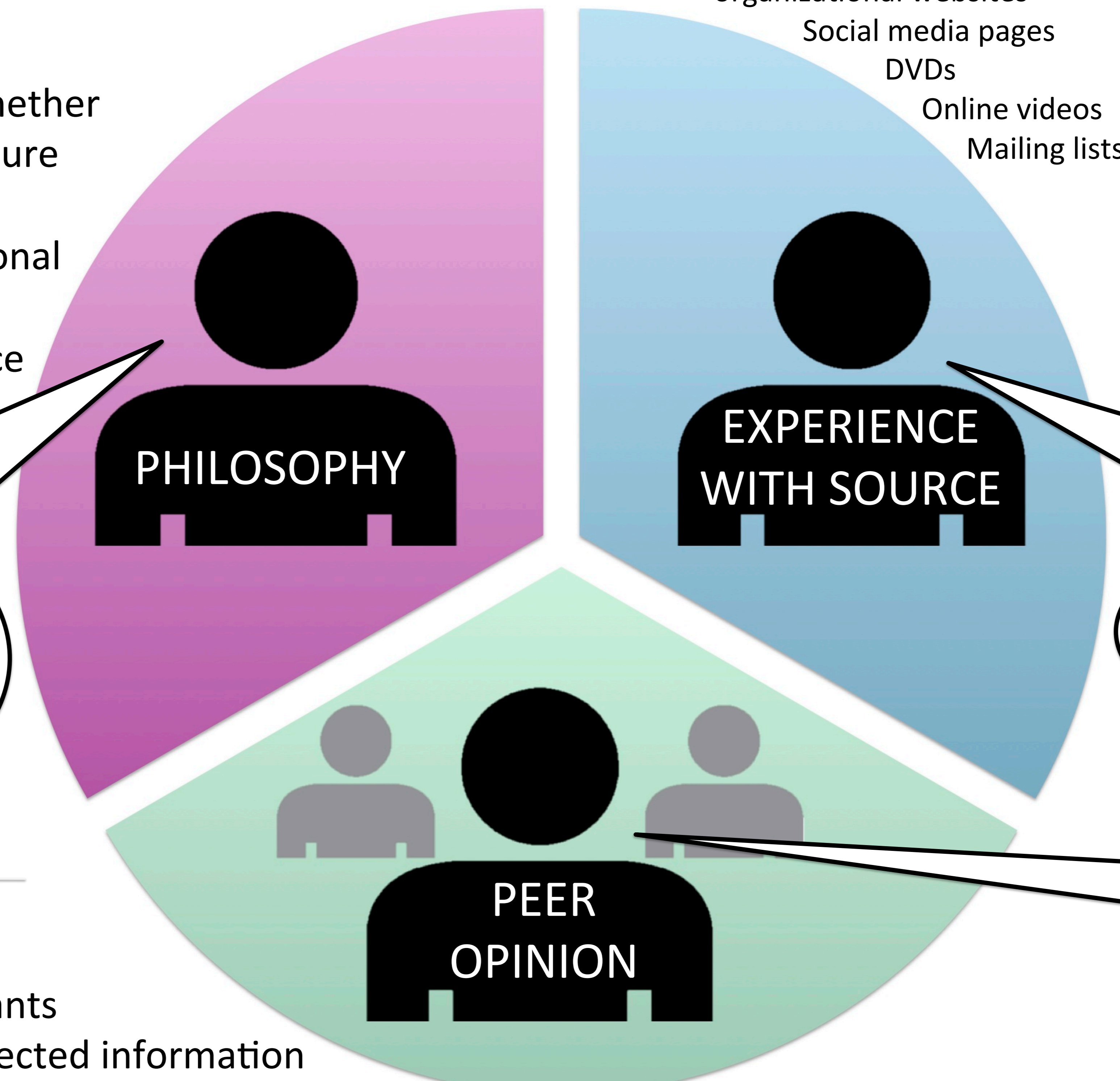
## Results

### Consultation

Source type	Examples from interviews
People	Colleagues Other assistance dog trainers Current and future partners Partners' social contacts Veterinarians Therapists Pet dog trainers Exhibitors at dog shows
Documents	Books Trade magazines Educational institution magazines Government, medical, and organizational websites Social media pages DVDs Online videos Mailing lists

### Consultation Factors

- Time
  - "I'm not very good about staying on the computer and being on the phone for long periods of time, because I'm always running, and doing this, and doing that."
- Money
  - "It's resources, like, money [...]. [Money] limits us to what extent you can get information. Let's say we need to learn from a person, like, you know, in a person's seminar.... That comes down to the professional development budget that we have, our organization, and how to carve that out."
- Accessibility:
  - "I think for me, what frustrates me is not being able to [...] look at the stuff before I actually buy it. Because a lot of the stuff is so specific that you can't just go down to the bookstore and look at a book before you decide to buy it."



"There are a few people that I know, [...] that I've done courses with and stuff, so I trust them a little more."

"I would usually, if there's a new idea, I would talk to my colleagues about it."

### Implications for academic librarians

This population shares the following characteristics with distance learners:

- Geographically disparate individuals
- Continuous learning
- Need for access to specialized resources
- Prevalence of online information-sharing
- Need for sources to accommodate various learning styles (e.g. text, audiovisual)